0: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1945 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

Mr. Brayton a little later did the same for the Pwo dialect. The desire to read and to have an education arose among the Karens who became Christians, and as the Sgaw tribe has come into the Christian Church in much larger numbers than the Pwo it has consequently developed a larger literature. The greater part of this is of a distinctly Christian nature, designed to promote the spiritual life as well as to give general information. The people have not had time to create a modern literature of their own although a small beginning had been made before the Japanese invasion. No doubt out of the hardships of these war years a new literature will be born.

VII

DRESS

The Karens had a distinctive dress in their primitive state. Not only was there a national style but each individual village in the hills had its distinctive variations which marked a man's origin.

The general dress of the Karens was an uncut garment made by sewing together two breadths of cloth as they came from the rude loom, leaving a hole in the middle of one end for the head and two small holes at the upper corners for the arms. It was made of their own home-grown cotton, which was raised, carded, spun and woven, as well as dyed, by their women-folk. The ground was usually white as it came unbleached from the loom. They interwove decorations of red and sometimes of black.

Among the Sgaw Karens the smock (called a *Hsay*) was white with a wide lower border of red. The garment reached from the shoulders to the calves and was the only bit of clothing worn. It was large and

10: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1945 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

roomy so that a man could squat down and pull his knees up inside the garment. Sometimes it was folded around the loins as its wearer squatted on the ground or mat. On cold mornings extra warmth was obtained by wrapping a blanket round the body, either a thick one of the same hand-woven cotton, or one of wool bought from some bazaar.

In the Toungoo Hills, the Bwè and other tribes usually wore a shorter smock, with all kinds and variations of stripes, which would hardly reach to their knees. They covered their legs with baggy Shan "bombies" or pants, usually black in colour.

For a number of years the Karens on the plains and in the towns have worn the usual Burmese dress consisting of a *longyi* (skirt) with a white jacket in the warm weather and dark thick imported clothing in the cold.

The usual dress for the women has been the *longyi*, worn over the lower part of the body and a shorter *hsay* or smock over the upper part. The former was woven by the women themselves but the latter was often of imported cloth, usually black. Sometimes black velvet was used for the smock. Among the Sgaws the finest smocks were made of homespun black or dark blue cloth and were trimmed with rows of Job's Tears, the white seeds that grow readily in their plantations. Otherwise, bits of blue or red ribbon or strips of cloth were used for ornaments. Often many strings of beads were wrapped about the neck, some of which were supposed to have magical value to ward off evil spirits.

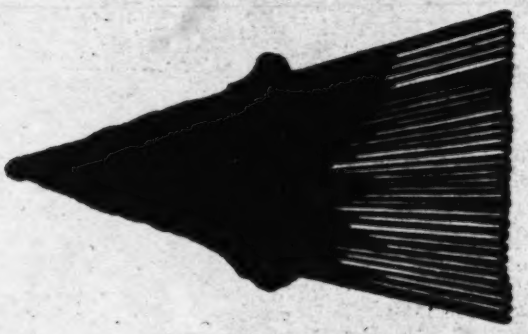
The women of the villages near Thandaung among the Bwès, or Mopghas as they call themselves, wove very elaborate skirts in which a number of colours were beauti-

12: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1918) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

at the bottom. The Red Karen, who take their name from their red garments, wear short breeches of red cotton and a short close-fitting tunic of the same color. These soon become the color of dirt from the generous accretions of that substance which adhere to them. These people use a blanket, which is red and white striped when new. They discard both the tunic and blanket in warm weather. Cotton is the most common material used, but in Toungoo silk is often used, either alone or with the cotton.

In Lower Burma, on the plains, it has become customary for the men to wear Burmese garments. The only time they put on their Karen garments, if they have them, is when they hold their "Bgha" feast. The different tribes to the east wear the Shan costume, with more or less variation, all the way to the Chinese Border.

The Karen men knot up their long hair on the top of the head or over the right or left ear, according to the custom of their particular locality, fastening it with a small triangular bamboo comb. No other head-dress is worn, except a piece of white muslin or other light-weight cloth, which may be put over the head as a turban or around it like a fillet, unless one should include the ornamental head-bands of the Karenni youth who, before marriage, wear necklaces of stones that have been handed down from father to son for generations, and ornaments for the head, neck, and ears, consisting of mother-of-pearl buttons interspersed with the shining wings of beautiful green beetles. All these are, however, given up at marriage and become the property of the bride.



A Karen Bamboo Comb

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1918) 1923 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

In the matter of adopting foreign dress the women are more conservative than the men. Long after every man in a village has taken on the Burmese costume, the women continue to wear their characteristic black smock over their Burmese jacket and "longyi" (skirt).

The Sgaw and Pwo women, after arriving at the age of puberty, wear a smock ("hse") and a shirt ("ni"). Little girls wear a single "hse," falling from their neck to their ankles, at least when it is new. In some villages they wear a white "hse," without any ornament or color, but in other places they wear a black garment ornamented with colored yarns at the neck and around the armholes. In some localities the maidens wear the long white "hse," reaching to the ankles, until they are married; but it is more common for them to put on the skirt and wear a shorter "hse" at about the time they arrive at maturity.

The women's dress varies from one tribe to another, and in some instances each village has its particular weave. There is considerable general similarity of the Karen designs to those in the Malay countries, in Borneo, and in the Philippines; but the particular Karen design, among the Sgaw women at least, is that supposed to be derived from the python. The story is that "Naw Mu E," one of the mythical characters of ancient times, was kidnapped by a fabulous White Python and carried off to his den. Later, her husband, hearing of her plight, came and rescued her by sacrificing himself at the mouth of the den, whereupon the woman was released and enabled to return to the upper earth again. Various versions of the story exist, one of which is that she was compelled by the python to weave patterns on its skin that still remain, but on being released showed her contempt for it by weaving skirts for herself of the same pattern, thus giving it the gravest insult she could inflict. This pattern soon became general among Karen women.

Other patterns, of which there are many, are called by various names, as seeds, little pagodas, cowries, etc. Especially beautiful is the pattern or weave worn by the Mopgha women, which consists of a variety of figures in magenta, yellow, and green on a black ground. I have been told that the weaving of the designs for these skirts has become a lost art, none of the young women of the few villages of the Mopgha tribe having learned to weave these garments. The Bwe women usually wear a black "ni" or skirt with

19: Marshall M-6 (ca. 1948) 1952 AFI Burma
Karen AFI

a few horizontal stripes of white and red running through the middle. 291 286

Women's Garments

(1) A "kho yee" or head-dress of a Sgaw Karen. (2) A smock ("hsi") and a skirt ("ta"), Sgaw Karen, from the Papi Hills, Toungoo District. The smock is embroidered with colored yarns and "Job's Tears." The middle of the skirt shows the python pattern. (3) A Sgaw Karen smock and skirt from Shwegyin District. This smock is trimmed with red braid, except the lower part which is finely woven ("ta").

The women of all these tribes wear the simplest kind of a skirt; it is a straight slip which, instead of being gathered about the waist, is drawn tight across the back, folded across the front, 291

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

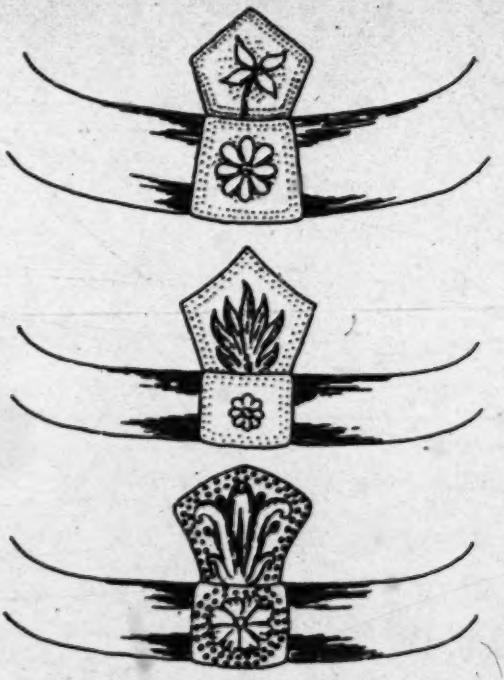
and the fulness tucked in at the waist line, thus allowing the action of the knees. The garment remains in place remarkably well, although no belt is used. When the women bathe—those on the plains doing so with much more regularity than their sisters in the hills—they bring the top of the skirt up under the armpits and fasten it over the breasts in the same manner as about the waist.

The jackets or smocks of the women present a variety of designs. The most common is the plain black or dark blue "hse" with little or no ornament on it. Sometimes it is decorated with small rosettes or stars of colored yarns or, among the Pwo, with fern-like figures. The prettiest decorations are made with the hard white seeds of various shapes of the plant called Job's Tears *(Coix)*. The variety mostly used are those resembling barberries, called "bwe" in Sgaw Karen and found all over the hills. These are sewed on the finished garment in parallel rows, in rows forming V-shaped figures, or in the forms of stars or rosettes and edging the arm and neck holes. Red yarns or pieces of red cloth are also sewed on to add to the ornamentation. In Shwegyin we often see a "hse" that is woven with elaborate designs of red and green on a black ground, red tape being sewed in vertical lines on the body of the garment and in horizontal lines over the shoulders. The head-dress of the women is called "hko peu ki" and among the Sgaw women consists of a piece of cloth about two yards long and a foot wide. The middle part is plain white. At either end there is a fancy woven ("u") portion about twenty inches long, red in color and crossed at intervals of two inches by transverse lines. In the middle of these colored ends is a white zigzag line representing a serpent. The other lines are in pairs, those equidistant from the zigzag above and below being alike and having their special designations. These names are, however, in archaic form, and their meaning is not well known. There are long white fringes on the ends of the head-dress and shorter colored ones at the ends of the cross lines. When worn, it is twisted about the head in such a way as to form a peak over the forehead with the colored fringes hanging down about the eyes and the long white fringes down the back. In a few villages in the Pegu Hills the women wear circlets ("hko hhlaw") of bamboo or silver, around which they coil their hair. The metal circlets are made of beaten silver a scant inch in width and long enough to go once and a half around the head, being held

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

by a fancy clasp at the back, which keeps the band in place. Such silver circlets are valued at about ten rupees or more, according to the work on them.

The Karen make blankets of the same cloth that they use for their garments. They use two strips of white edged with red sel-



· WOMENS' HEAD-DRESS ·

vedges, each piece being four yards long. These are sewed together lengthwise, and then one outer edge is sewed up to provide a half-open sleeping-bag. The fringes of the open end are drawn up over the head.

On the whole, the Karen are very careful about exposing their persons. The women have always worn the closed skirts and not the open "tamein," which was formerly in vogue among the Burmese. They seldom go without their jackets, though in the hills older women now and then leave them off. Little children run about more or less naked. Boys often find their garments a bother and

19: Marshall M-6 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

The wet garment is then pounded on a stone or soused up and down in the water a few times, and that is about all the laundering it gets. White jackets are washed out with soap and, in the towns, are given to the Indian washermen ("dhobies") for proper "doing up." 296

For protection from the rain the Karen use the wide-spreading fronds of the palm, which are nature's models for the paper umbrellas of the Chinese and Burmese. Workers in the paddy-fields make raincoats out of thatch woven on flexible bark fibre stays, which they tie across their shoulders. Three or four layers of the thatch make a protection that reaches to the knees. For a hat they tie a bit of palm leaf over the head, or wear a round umbrella-shaped hat like those made by the Shan and Burmese out of the sheathes of the cocoanut-palm or of bamboo. While transplanting rice on the plains a rain cover is made of these same sheathes or of tough large leaves covered with a network of thin bamboo splints bound with rattan. These covers are scoop-shaped and hang from the head down the back, causing a company of cultivators, bent over their work while wearing them, to look like long-legged tortoises wading in the mud. 292 287

Every Karen carries a bag ("hteu") slung over his shoulder as a part of his outfit. It is his pocket, in which he carries everything from money to the small game he has shot. The bag is woven in two parts. One, which forms the straps, consists of a strip from four to six inches wide and five or six feet long. Both ends are fringed. The other piece is from six to eight inches wide and from two to three feet in length. Each end of the long piece is folded lengthwise in the middle and sewed together, thus forming the corners of the bag. The short piece is folded crosswise in the middle and sewed to these corners or ends, thus forming the sides of the bag. The hemmed ends of the short piece form the edges of the mouth of the bag. The cloth woven for these bags is usually red with lengthwise stripes of white, yellow, or black. Different tribes have their different patterns and shades of color. The Karen do not ornament their bags so highly as do the Kachin tribes in Upper Burma. 415 286 301

Every Karen woman and girl has some sort of a necklace. It may be a few seeds of the Job's Tears strung together, or some glass beads purchased from wandering peddlers, or silver beads made by Burmese silversmiths who visit the Karen villages during the dry season to pick up odd jobs. A common variety of beads is 301

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

283 found all over Burma. This contrivance is of the simplest form, consisting of a driving-wheel about two feet in diameter with spokes and rim of bamboo, the axle of which is fitted in an ornamental flat post rising from one corner of a thick bottom board, which is three and a half feet long and a foot or more wide. Near the middle of the other end of this board a shorter post rises, to the base of which is affixed a little wheel, with a grooved rim, in line with the driving-wheel, the two wheels being connected by a slender belt. There is a handle on the large wheel and a horizontal iron spindle fastened in the center of the little one. The spinner sits on the floor, with her machine drawn up to her knees in front of her, the driving-wheel at her left hand and the point of the spindle at her right. She attaches some fibers of a roll to a spun thread tied to the spindle, and sets this to rotating rapidly by turning the large wheel with her left hand, meantime continuing to pay out the fibers from the roll with her right hand. After the spindle has twisted the loose filaments into a tight yarn, the spinner feeds the newly spun yarn on to the spindle and repeats the process with another roll of fibers, until the spindle is full.

II. Dyeing and Weaving

386 The next stage in the work is that of dyeing. The colors imparted to the skeins of cotton yarn are shades of blue to black, red, and yellow. In producing the blue shades the skeins are soaked in a solution of the bark or leaves of the wild indigo plant, called "naw xaw" in Karen, the depth of the color depending on the duration and repetition of the soaking, until a blue black has been obtained. The red dyes are derived from the stick-lac so commonly found in the Toungoo Hills. During the years just preceding the World War a good deal of foreign dyestuff was introduced among the Karen people, and yellow came to be used in addition to the other colors.[1]

286 The weaving of the yarn into cloth comes next in order. The threads that are to form the warp of the cloth must first be got ready for the hand-loom ("hta"). This is done by unwinding the skeins and stringing the thread around a few pegs driven into a leveled and cleared space of ground, until enough has been laid down to fill the loom. If there is no convenient place out-of-doors for this purpose, the long threads are strung on pegs around the

[1] For an account of dyes and methods of dyeing in Burma, see *The Upper Burma Gazetteer*, Vol. II, Pt. I, 527-532.

19: Marshall M-6 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

family living-room or along one side of the corridor of the village-house. The Karen loom is a primitive affair much like those to be seen among the hill tribes in Burma, the Kachin, for example, or to be found in Malaysia and the adjacent regions. The Karen loom has no frame, differing in this respect from the Burmese loom. It consists of little more than a bamboo pole five and a half or six feet long, over which the warp-threads are passed, this pole being held in place four feet or so above the floor against the back partition of a living-room, two of whose large bamboo uprights have holes in them for inserting the pole. From this support the warp extends at an incline some ten or twelve feet to the lap of the weaver, who holds it taut by means of a strap around her waist, while she sits flat on the floor with her feet braced against a section of large bamboo. The threads of the two layers are kept in place by being passed through heddles consisting of small loops attached to bamboo bars, alternate threads being thus strung on one or the other of one or more pairs of bars. On a shuttle of bamboo the filling or woof-thread is wound. It is passed by hand from side to side between the separated layers of the warp, is pulled taut, and then forced tight against the last of the interwoven threads by a piece of Burmese ebony wood, shaped like the enlarged blade of a pocket-knife. As the work progresses, the finished cloth is rolled away on the rod in the weaver's lap, only a yard or two being the product of an ordinary day's work. On the plains the younger generation of Karen women use the Burmese loom and can accomplish more with it. (See illustrations, pp. 112, 114.)

Variations in color are obtained by introducing different colors of thread. When a colored pattern is woven for a skirt or the border of a blanket, this process is called "u," meaning primarily "inserting the fingers" in reference to picking up certain threads under which the filling threads must be passed in order to produce the desired pattern.

After its removal from the loom the cloth is plunged into water and spread out to dry. Knots are tucked in and straggling ends removed, but no other finishing is thought necessary. Such cloth is very firm and almost indestructible. The width of a strip as it comes from the loom is from eighteen to twenty inches. Between three and four yards are required for a skirt. This length is cut in half. By sewing the two resulting pieces together side by side the proper dimensions for a skirt are secured. The ends of this

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

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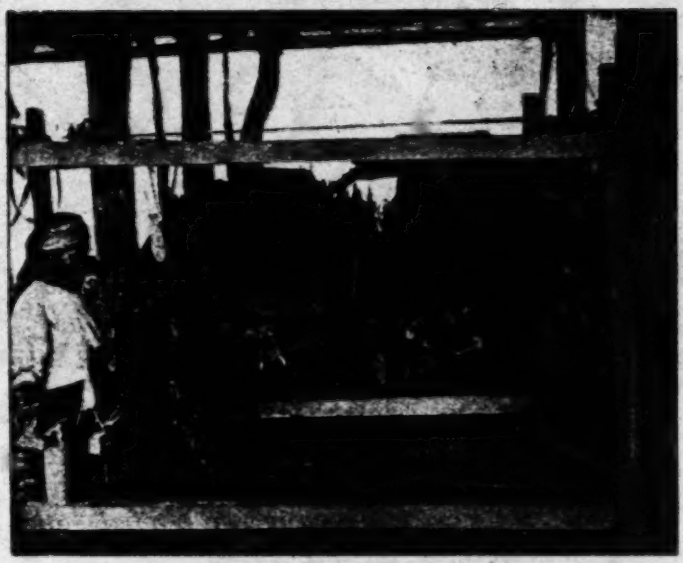

A KAREN GIRL AT A BURMESE LOOM
This loom, which has a frame and is more easily operated than the Karen loom, is in common use among the Karen women on the plains.

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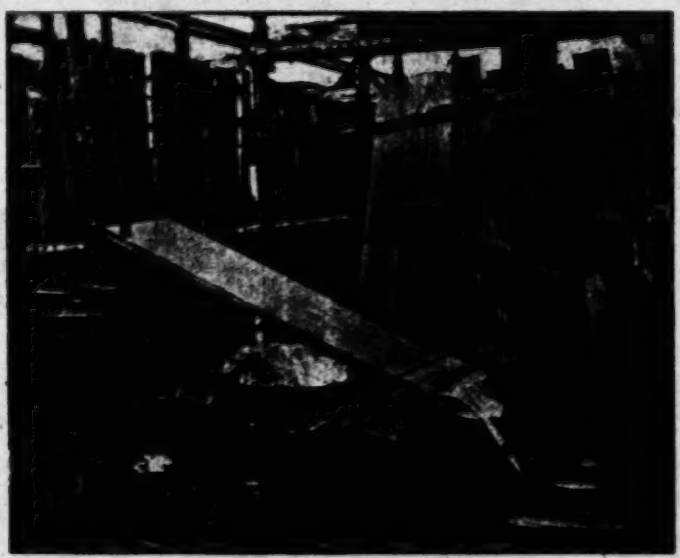

THE KAREN LOOM
This loom is simplicity itself. The airy construction of the Karen family-room is shown in this picture.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

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cut a green bamboo, divide it into strips, and weave one of these in a few minutes, and then discard it after he has reached home.

Inasmuch as the people of the Toungoo country have higher hills to climb and longer distances to travel than those dwelling lower down in the Pegu ranges, they carry their produce in smaller baskets than do the latter. These Toungoo baskets have the shape of an inverted pyramid with the apex blunted. Sometimes they are woven of rattan and nicely finished, sometimes loosely made of bamboo splints. In the houses of the Toungoo Hills I have seen enormous spreading baskets for the storage of grain and other things.

The hill people make small, closely woven receptacles for carrying ordinary articles and also for keeping things dry during the rainy season. They render these baskets water-tight by coating them with gum and afterwards with "thitse" (Burmese lacquer). Probably the Karen have copied this type of basket from the Burmese or the Shan, who make extensive use of them. On the plains the small round basket, holding about three pecks, is in constant service. It is Burmese in origin, as is one of its names, "taw" (from the Burmese word, "taung"). Its other name is "na."

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A Karen Maiden Weaving under Her House

25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

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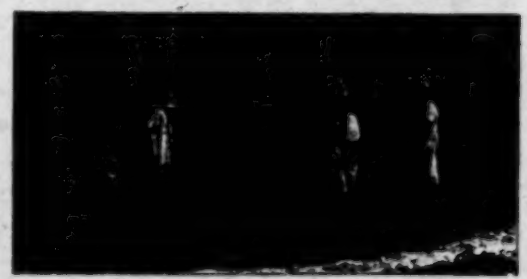
343. KAREN SPRING-SPEAR (DYAN.)

making traps and snares for animals, whose habits they observe closely, and whose calls they mimic. Squirrels are their principal quarry. For deer they set a spring-spear called *dyan* at a salt-lick. This is a source of danger to travellers, who have to be on their guard for the warning sign set at the approaches to the *dyan*. They keep common wild cocks and pheasant cocks, as well as doves, for decoys. The decoy-cock is tied by the leg to a post in the centre of a circle of snares; when a wild bird hears him crow and comes to fight he is caught. [857] The chief game of Karén children is transfixing bamboo hoops as they bound past, a practice for spearing running game. The Karéns use a cross-bow [411] (No. 204), with simple, and occasionally also with poisoned arrows. All the [412] Karén utensils are of home manufacture, with the significant exception of the *dâ* and axe, their chief implements, which are made by Shans and Burmans. [439] They even make rough pottery when at a distance from the market. The [286] women spin, dye, and weave their own yarn; but they are beginning to use the ready-dyed yarn that is imported. Every member of a Karén household 585 labours for the common fund. Young Karéns do not marry till mature—twenty to twenty-four. Marriages are arranged by the elders; but, if a pair mate of their own choice, the lad has to give a buffalo or its value to the girl's parents. Unlike the marriages of the civilised races of the country, the Karén marriage is a great festivity. 291 Karén unmarried women wear only a [562] long smock (*thinddâng*) [224] of plain white. Married women wear a blue embroidered smock over a figured loin-000 cloth. Men and women



344. KAREN HUNTERS DRIVING IN WILD PIG.

25; Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7
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848. KAREN HOOP-DANCE.

The Karenni, or "Red Karéns," have a language of Karén structure, but the people recall the truculent Kachín much more than the mild Karén. They inhabit a plateau about half the size of Wales, lying between the northern limit of the White Karéns and the southern limit of Shans and Kachíns. The *Karenni* are darker-skinned than the Karéns. They use red and black colours in their clothing; the men wear short pants, sleeveless Shan jackets, and a red *gaung-baung*. The women wear a black cloth, somewhat after the manner of the Siamese women; they do most of the labour, even the tilling of the rice-fields, which are on the Shan model; but *taungya* is practised also. They brew a liquor from millet-corn, which the men always carry in their gourd. The villages are permanent, situated on points of vantage, and are stockaded. Feuds between villages are chronic and form the chief concern of the male population. Such of the Karenni as settle in the lowlands adopt the Shan civilisation and dress.

C 105

The Chins are believed by some to represent the stock from which the Burman tribes originated, and to have descended into the valley of the Irawadi from the plateau of Tibet, with the inhabitants of which the Burmans and Chins possess linguistic affinities not shared by other races of the Peninsula. The Chins are the hill-people of the mountains west of the Irawadi and its great tributary the Chindwin. The tribes are many and diverse. Towards the south and on the borders of the plains they are Burmanised in a great measure, and have dropped their primitive characteristics, notably their language. They call themselves Ashō. The black tattooing of the women's faces, which is the most distinctive of

K [286]

849. KAREN WOMAN WEAVING.